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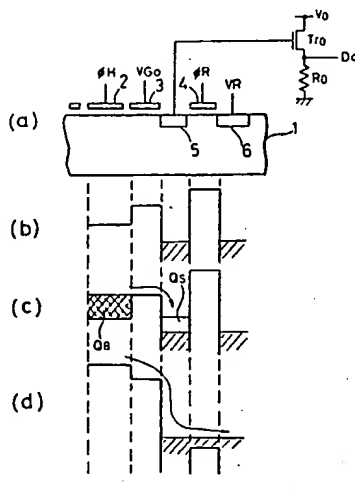
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(54) A method of driving a charge detection circuit.

(57) A method of driving a charge detection circuit of floating diffusion amplifier type includes, a second conductivity type diffusion region produced on a first conductivity type semiconductor substrate or layer, a voltage barrier production gate electrode provided adjacent to the diffusion region, a CCD final gate electrode provided adjacent to the voltage barrier production gate electrode, a MOS transistor for resetting the diffusion region produced with using the

diffusion region as a source electrode, a source follower circuit for receiving the voltage of the diffusion region as an input and an output signal, and when the entire signal charges are transferred to the voltage well below the CCD final gate electrode, the charges output to a diffusion region portion exceeding over a voltage barrier produced at below the voltage barrier production gate electrode.

FIG. 1.



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A Method of Driving A Charge Detection Circuit

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a method of driving a charge detection circuit, and more particularly to a driving method capable of improving the characteristics of the charge detection circuit which is used as an output circuit of a semiconductor integrated circuit.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

As a charge coupled device among semiconductor integrated circuits (hereinafter referred to as "CCD"), there is a charge detection circuit which is called as a floating diffusion amplifier which conducts a charge-voltage conversion.

Figure 6(a) shows a cross-sectional structure of a case where such floating diffusion type amplifier is used as an output circuit of CCD. In figure 6(a), at a predetermined position on a first conductivity type semiconductor substrate 1, a CCD final gate electrode 2 and a voltage barrier production gate electrode 3 are arranged. One of the driving clocks for the charge transfer ϕH is applied to the gate electrode 2 and a DC voltage V_{G0} is applied to the gate electrode 3. At a region adjacent to the gate electrode 3, a MOS transistor comprising a gate electrode 4 and second conductivity type high concentration impurity regions 5 and 6 is produced. To the gate electrode 4 of this MOS transistor, a reset clock ϕR is applied, and by making this reset clock ϕR at high level, the MOS transistor is turned on. Further, a reset power supply VR is connected to the impurity region 6.

The impurity region 5 is called as a floating diffusion, and it is connected to a gate of a source follower transistor Tr_0 for outputting which is produced on the same semiconductor substrate 1. A source follower power supply V_0 is applied to the drain of the transistor Tr_0 . Further, the source of the transistor Tr_0 is grounded by a load resistance R_0 and an output D_0 is output from the connection node of the source and the load resistance R_0 .

The device will operate as follows.

Figure 6(b) to (d) show potentials of the respective portions of figure 6(a) at timings corresponding to t_1 to t_3 , respectively, of the clock timing chart of figure 7.

First of all, at time t_1 of figure 7, the driving clock ϕH is at high level, and a potential well is produced at below the gate electrode 2 as shown in figure 6(b), thereby to store signal charges Q . At the same time, the clock reset ϕR is at high level, and the MOS transistor constituted by the gate

electrode 4 and the impurity regions 5 and 6 is turned on, and the voltages of the impurity region 5 and the gate of the transistor Tr_0 which is connected thereto are reset to the reset power supply voltage VR .

Next, at time T_2 of figure 7, the reset clock ϕR becomes low level, and the MOS transistor constituted by the gate electrode 4 and the impurity region 5 is turned off (refer to figure 6(c)). When the reset clock ϕR changes to low level from high level, the voltage of the impurity region 5 is lowered due to the capacitance coupling between the gate electrode 4 and the impurity region 5 during the period of the reset clock ϕR being low level, and the node connected to the impurity region 5 becomes floating.

Next, at time T_3 of figure 7, when the driving clock ϕH becomes low level, the signal charges Q stored at the potential well below the gate electrode 2 is read out to the impurity region 5 (refer to figure 6(d)), and the voltage of the node of the impurity region 5 is changed, and this voltage change is output through the source follower circuit. The amplitude of the output ΔV is represented by the following formula when the capacitance of the floating diffusion node is made C_{FD} and the gain of the source follower is made G ,

$$\Delta V = \frac{G \cdot Q}{C_{FD}} \quad \dots (1)$$

The gain of the source follower is usually about 0.7 to 0.9 without variations, and in order to increase ΔV against the same charge quantity Q , it is necessary to lower the capacitance C_{FD} . As ΔV is larger against the same charge quantity Q , the charge-voltage conversion gain is larger, and this is advantageous in view of S/N.

On the other hand, the charge maximum quantity which can be detected by the charge detection circuit is up to the charge quantity which gives a voltage change which would not exceed the channel potential below the gate electrode 3 even when the signal charges are stored at the impurity region 5, and thus the capacitance C_{FD} determines the maximum quantity of charges which can be detected. When the C_{FD} is tried to be reduced thereby to increase the charge-voltage conversion gain, the voltage change of the floating diffusion portion is increased but the maximum charge quantity capable of being detected is reduced.

Figure 8 shows the relation between the quantity Q of signal charges which are electrically and

optically generated by the CCD and the amplitude of the output of the source follower transistor ΔV . As shown in the figure, the relation between the Q and ΔV is linear up to the saturation level $D_{0\max}$ of the output which is determined by the design of CCD and the circuit system of the source follower transistor. When it exceeds the level, the output ΔV is saturated against the input Q , or shifted from linear characteristics. When the capacitance C_{FD} is decreased and the amplitude ΔV of the output against the charge quantity Q of the input is increased from a to b as shown in the figure, thereby to increase the charge-voltage conversion gain, the maximum charge quantity is reduced from $Q_{a\max}$ to $Q_{b\max}$, and a small signal charge q_s which is superimposed on the background cannot be detected.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of driving a charge detection circuit in which the detectable maximum charge quantity would not be reduced even when the charge-voltage conversion gain is increased.

Other objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description given hereinafter; it should be understood, however, that the detailed description and specific embodiment are given by way of illustration only, since various changes and modifications within the spirit and scope of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from this detailed description.

According to an aspect of the present invention, a method of driving a charge detection circuit of a floating diffusion amplifier type is constituted such that there are provided a second conductivity type diffusion region produced on a first conductivity type semiconductor substrate, a voltage barrier production gate electrode provided adjacent to the diffusion region, a CCD final gate electrode provided adjacent to the voltage barrier production gate electrode, a MOS transistor for resetting the diffusion region produced with using the diffusion region as a source electrode, and a source follower circuit which operates to receive the voltage of the diffusion region as an input and to output an output signal, and when the entirety of signal charges are transferred to the voltage well below the CCD final gate electrode, charges of a portion of the entirety of signal charges are output to the diffusion region portion exceeding over the voltage barrier produced at below the voltage barrier production gate electrode.

According to another aspect of the present invention, the charges output to the diffusion region exceeding over the voltage barrier produced at

below the voltage barrier production gate electrode when signal charges are transferred to the voltage well below the CCD final gate electrode is made a first output signal, and after this first output signal is reset, the charges remaining below the CCD final gate electrode are output to the diffusion region portion as a second output signal.

According to a further aspect of the present invention, the voltage applied to the voltage barrier production gate electrode during the signal output period in the above described two driving methods is varied in a step configuration.

Therefore, the charge-voltage conversion gain can be increased, and the maximum charge quantity which can be effectively detected by the charge detection circuit can be increased.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a diagram showing a cross-sectional structure of a charge detection circuit according to a method of driving a charge detection circuit as a first embodiment of the present invention and the potentials at the respective portions of the circuit;

Figure 2 is a diagram showing clock timings of the driving method of the above-described first embodiment;

Figure 3 is a diagram showing a cross-sectional structure according to a second embodiment of the present invention and the potentials at the respective portions of the circuit;

Figure 4 is a diagram showing the clock timings of the driving method of the second embodiment;

Figure 5 is a diagram showing the waveform of the voltage applied to the gate electrode according to a third embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 6 is a diagram showing a cross-sectional structure of a charge detection circuit according to the prior art and the potentials at the respective portions of the circuit;

Figure 7 is a diagram showing clock timings for explaining the operation of the prior art device; and

Figure 8 is a diagram showing the relation between the signal charge quantity Q and the output ΔV of the charge detection circuit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

An embodiment of the present invention will be described in detail with reference to the drawings.

Figure 1(a) is a diagram showing a cross-sectional structure of a charge detection circuit which is employed in a method of driving a charge

detection circuit according to a first embodiment of the present invention. This charge detection circuit has the same structure as that shown in figure 6(a).

The driving method of the charge detection circuit according to the first embodiment of the present invention will be described. Figures 1(b) to 1(d) show potentials of respective portions of figure 1(a) at times corresponding to t_1 to t_3 of the clock timing charts of figure 2. In figure 2, t_0 designates a timing when signal charges are transferred to the voltage well below the CCD final gate electrode 2.

First of all, at time t_1 of figure 2, the driving clock ϕH is at high level, and a voltage well is produced at below the gate electrode 2 as shown in figure 1(b). The floating diffusion is in a reset state.

Next, at time t_2 of figure 2, signal charges are transferred to the voltage well below the gate electrode 2 at time t_0 . Then, the signal charges $Q_s (= Q_D + q_s)$ which have overflowed with remaining signal charges Q_B which are stored at the capacitance of the voltage well below the gate electrode 2, will exceed the potential barrier below the voltage barrier production gate electrode 3 and are transferred to the impurity region 5 of floating diffusion, and the voltage change of the floating diffusion portion due thereto are read out through the source follower circuit (refer to figure 1(c)).

Next, at time t_3 of figure 2, the reset clock R is made high level, and the MOS transistor comprising the gate electrode 4 and the impurity regions 5 and 6 is turned on, and the ϕH is made low level, and the signal charges Q_B stored at below the gate electrode 2 flow into the reset power supply VR through the channel below the gate electrode 2 and the MOS transistor, and the floating diffusion is reset (refer to figure 1(d)). Accordingly, in this embodiment, the component Q_s except for the background component Q_B among the entirety of charge quantity $Q (= Q_B + Q_s)$ is detected.

In this embodiment, the signal charge quantity $Q_s (= Q_D + q_s)$ which is obtained by subtracting the background component Q_B of a predetermined quantity from the signal charge quantity $Q (= Q_B + Q_D + q_s)$ which has been conventionally detected is detected as discussed above. Therefore, the small signal charge quantity q_s which is superimposed on the background can be surely detected even when the charge-voltage conversion gain is increased. Further, the saturation level D_{0max} of the output may be determined by circuit design to such a value that the maximum quantity of signal charge quantity Q_s can be detected, thereby enabling to increase the detectable maximum charge quantity.

In the present invention, in order to detect the small signal charges superimposed on the background, the background component Q_B of signal

charge quantity Q is subtracted at the final stage for obtaining the output by the charge detection circuit. However, it is also conceived to subtract the background of the signal charges for respective picture elements. In this case, however, there are generated fixed pattern noises for respective picture elements, thereby arising variations of output. To the contrary, in the present invention, the quantity of background to be subtracted can be made always constant, thereby arising no such problems.

Figures 3 and 4 show a method of driving a charge detection circuit according to a second embodiment of the present invention. Figure 3 corresponds to figure 1 of the first embodiment and figure 4 corresponds to figure 2 thereof. In figure 4, the operations at timings corresponding to t_1 to t_2 are the same as those in the above-described first embodiment, and operations at the timings of t_3 to t_6 will be described.

First of all, at time t_3 of figure 4, ϕR is made at a high level thereby to extract the signal charges $Q_s (= Q_D + q_s)$ at the floating diffusion to the reset power supply VR as well as to reset the voltage of the floating diffusion portion (figure 3(d)).

Next, the ϕR becomes low level at time t_4 of figure 4, and the floating diffusion portion comes into a floating state (refer to figure 3(e)).

Next, at time t_5 of figure 4, the ϕH becomes low level, and signal charges Q_B stored at below the gate electrode 2 are transferred to the floating diffusion portion exceeding over the potential barrier produced at below the gate electrode 3, and the voltage change of the floating diffusion portion due thereto is read out through the source follower (refer to figure 3(f)).

Next, at time t_6 of figure 4, the ϕR is again made at high level, and the signal charges Q_B which have been stored at the floating diffusion are extracted to the reset power supply VR and the voltage of the floating diffusion portion is reset (refer to figure 3(g)).

This second embodiment has a characteristics that the background component Q_B which is included in the signal component can be also detected as compared with the first embodiment. Accordingly, when such a delay circuit is provided at outside the circuit to measure the sum of the signal component Q_s and the background component Q_B , it is enabled to detect the entirety of charge quantity, as is quite effective in a case where the absolute quantity of signal is required, as a case where the temperature measurement is conducted with utilizing infrared rays.

Furthermore, the quantity of background component Q_B can be controlled by the DC voltage V_{G0} which is applied to the gate electrode 3 in the above described first and second embodiments. However, as shown in the third embodiment of the

present invention shown in figure 5, it may be operated such that the voltage VG_0 is varied in a step configuration during the signal reading out periods, thereby to extract signal charges which are stored at the floating diffusion to the reset power supply at each step as well as to reset the voltage of the floating diffusion portion. In such embodiment, the output which is determined by the level VG_0 may be successively obtained, and when the capacitance below the CCD final gate electrode is sufficiently large, the maximum charge quantity can be determined in accordance with the cycle time of reading out steps, and the detectable maximum charge quantity can be further increased, when the cycle time of reading out steps are numerous. This is effective in a variety of digital processings.

While in the above-illustrated embodiment an output circuit of CCD is described, the present invention may be applied to any type of integrated circuits such as MOS type image sensors which require conversion of charges to a voltage.

While in the above-illustrated embodiment a source follower circuit one stage is provided and a resistor is employed for the load thereof, there may be provided a plurality of stages of source follower circuits and the load may comprise a transistor with the same effects as described above.

While in the above-illustrated embodiment a charge detection circuit having a MOS type transistor constituted by producing second conductivity type impurity regions on a first conductivity type semiconductor substrate is described, the present invention may not be restricted to this structure, and it may be replaced by a first conductivity type semiconductor layer such as well which is produced on a second conductivity type semiconductor substrate.

Furthermore, since the present invention can be accomplished by a similar structure as that of the prior art device, an alternative usage of the prior art method and the present invention method can be simply conducted by an alteration of driving at the outside, thereby enabling operations at a plurality of modes.

Furthermore, the present invention may not be restricted to those having the above-described timing relations, and timing relations which enable the above-described operation may be employed.

As is evident from the foregoing description, according to the present invention, the charge quantity which can be stored at below the gate electrode direct before the charge detection circuit is made a charge quantity which is to be extracted as unrequired charge, and the extra signal charges which cannot be stored at below the gate electrode when signal charges are transferred to below the gate electrode are detected by a charge detection

circuit, and a signal which is obtained by extracting the background component of a predetermined quantity from the signal charges are output to be detected. Therefore, the carrier-voltage conversion gain of the charge detection circuit can be increased and the detectable maximum charge quantity can be also increased.

Claims

1. A method of driving a charge detection circuit of floating diffusion amplifier type comprising:

a second conductivity type diffusion region (5,6) produced on a first conductivity type semiconductor substrate or layer (1);

a voltage barrier production gate electrode (3) provided adjacent to said diffusion region (5,6);

a second gate electrode (2) provided adjacent to said voltage barrier production gate electrode (3);

a MOS transistor for resetting said diffusion region (5,6) produced with using said diffusion region (5,6) as a source electrode;

a source follower circuit for receiving the voltage of said diffusion region (5,6) as an input and an output signal; and

when the entirety of signal charges are transferred to the voltage well below said second gate electrode (2), the charges are output to a diffusion region portion exceeding over a voltage barrier produced at below said voltage barrier production gate electrode (3).

2. A method of driving a charge detection circuit as defined in claim 1, wherein the voltage applied to said voltage barrier production gate electrode (3) during said signal outputting period is varied in a step configuration.

3. A method of driving a charge detection circuit as defined in claim 2, wherein the voltage applied to said voltage barrier production gate electrode (3) during said signal outputting period is varied in a step configuration and charges output to said diffusion region portion at every step is output through said source follower circuit.

4. A method of driving a charge detection circuit as defined in claim 1, wherein said source follower circuit outputting said output signal is constituted in a multi-stage.

5. A method of driving a charge detection circuit of floating diffusion amplifier type, comprising:

a second conductivity type diffusion region (5,6) produced on a first conductivity type semiconductor substrate or layer (1);

a voltage barrier production gate electrode (3) provided adjacent to said diffusion region (5,6);

a second gate electrode (2) provided adjacent to

said voltage barrier production gate electrode (3);
a MOS transistor for resetting said diffusion region
(5,6) produced with using said diffusion region (5,6)
as a source electrode;

a source follower circuit which receives the voltage of
said diffusion region (5,6) as an input and out-
puts a signal corresponding to said input signal;
and

when the entire signal charges are transferred to
the voltage well below the said second gate elec-
trode (2), the charges output to the diffusion region
portion exceeding over a voltage barrier produced
at below said voltage barrier production gate elec-
trode (3) being made a first output signals and after
said first output signal is reset, the charges remain-
ing below the second gate electrode (2) being
output to the diffusion region portion as a second
output signal.

6. A method of driving a charge detection
circuit as defined in claim 5, wherein the voltage
applied to said voltage barrier production gate elec-
trode (3) during said signal outputting period is
varied in a step configuration.

7. A method of driving a charge detection
circuit as defined in claim 6, wherein the voltage
applied to said voltage barrier production gate elec-
trode (3) during said signal outputting period is
varied in a step configuration and charges output to
said diffusion region portion at every step is output
through said source follower circuit.

8. A method of driving a charge detection
circuit as defined in claim 5, wherein said source
follower circuit outputting said output signal is con-
stituted in a multi-stage.

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FIG. 1.

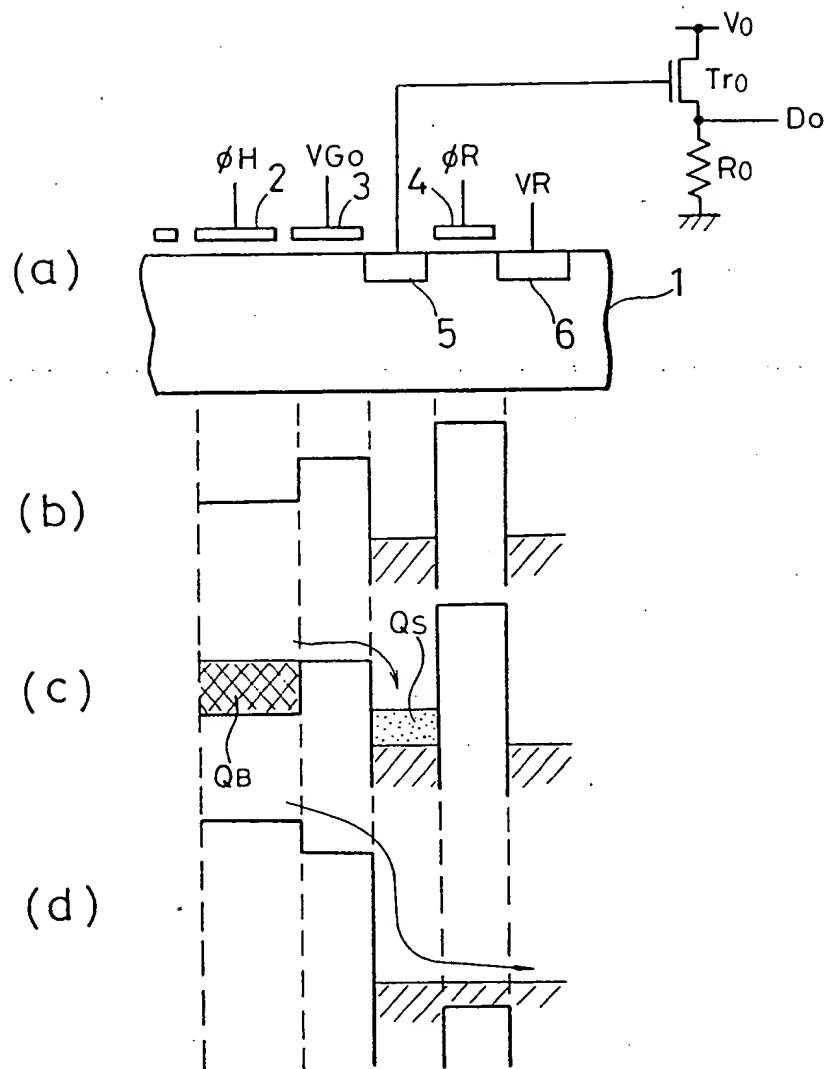


FIG. 2.

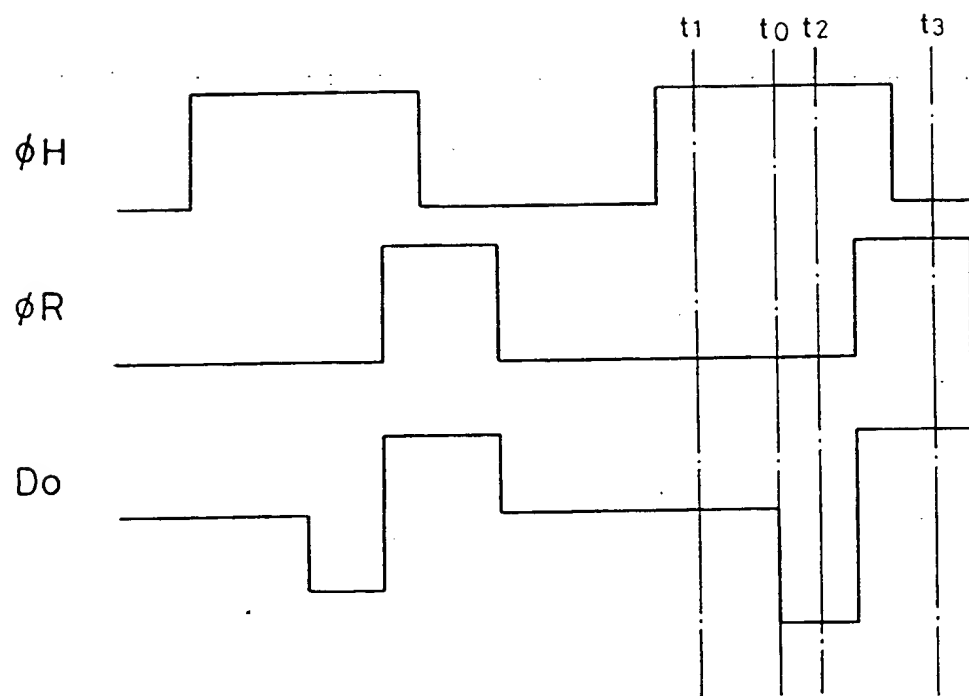


FIG. 3.

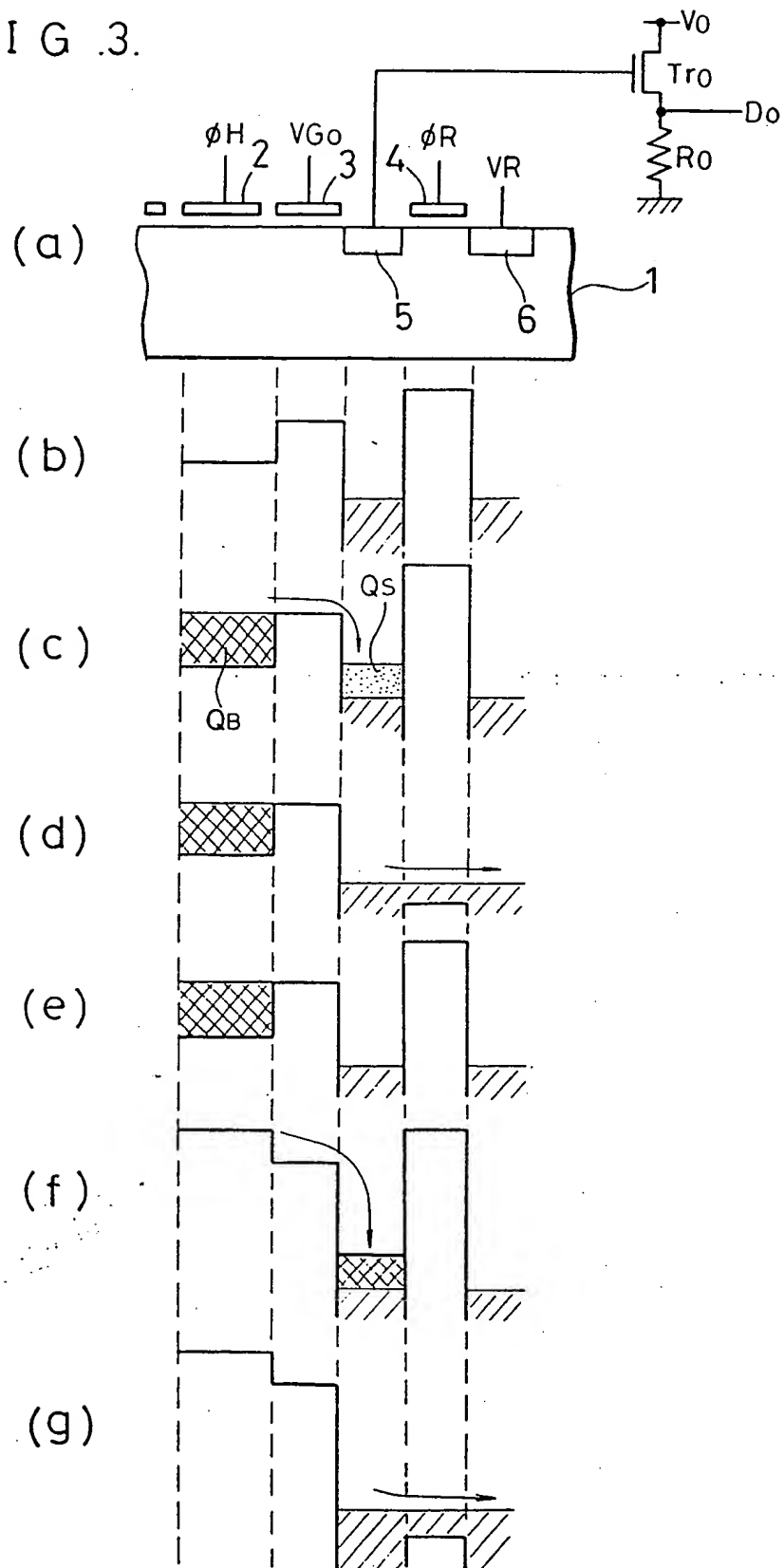


FIG. 4.

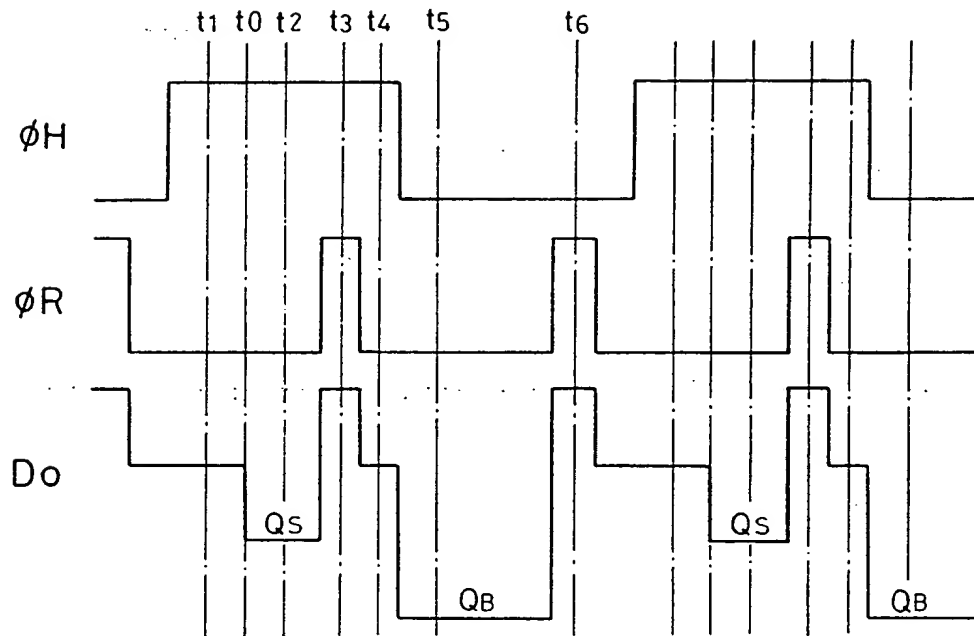


FIG. 5.

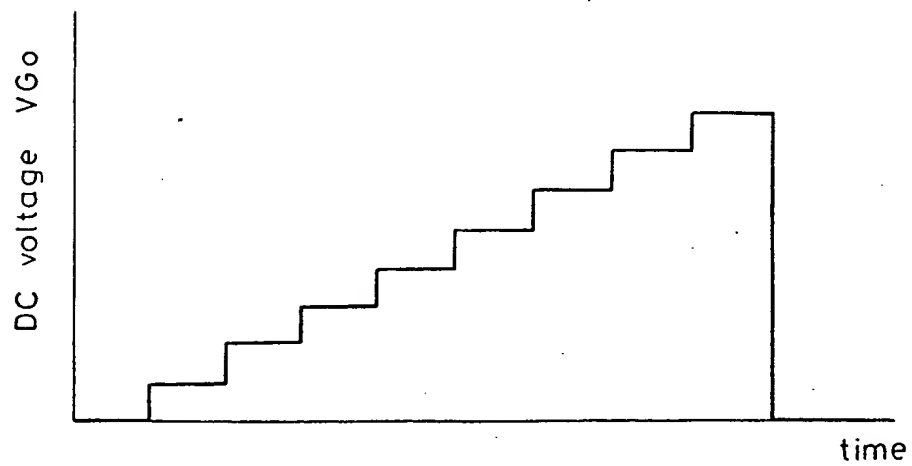


FIG. 6. (PRIOR ART)

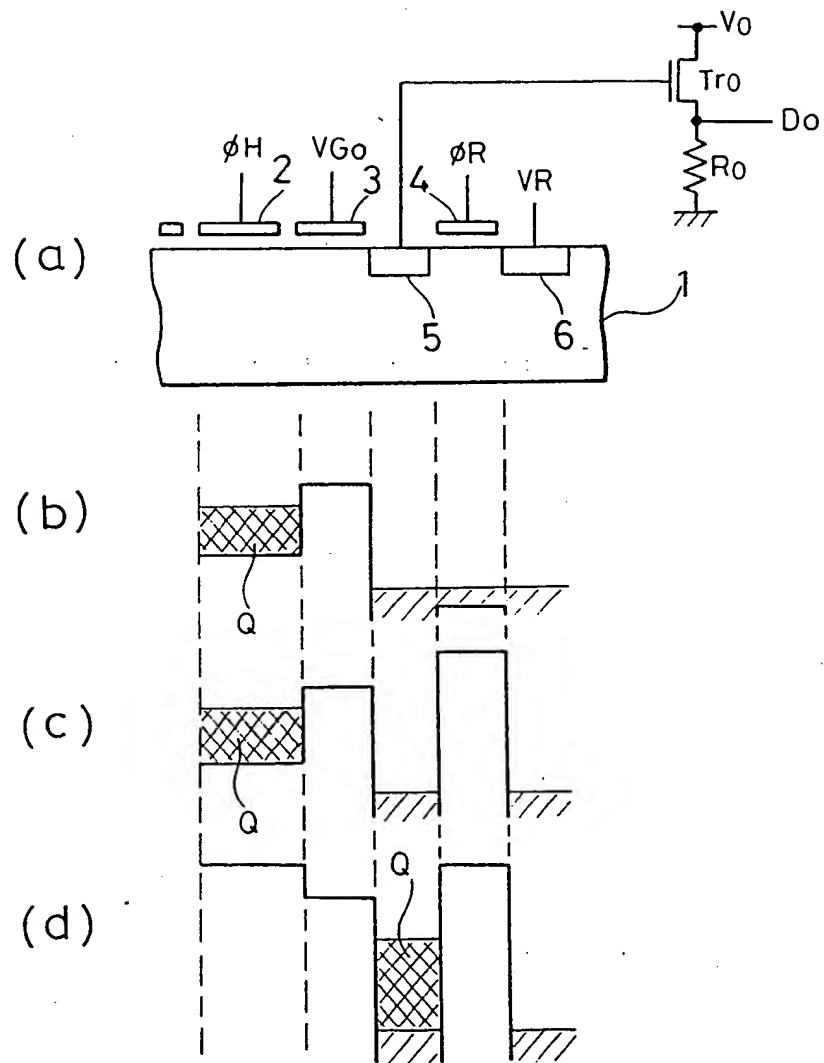


FIG. 7. (PRIOR ART)

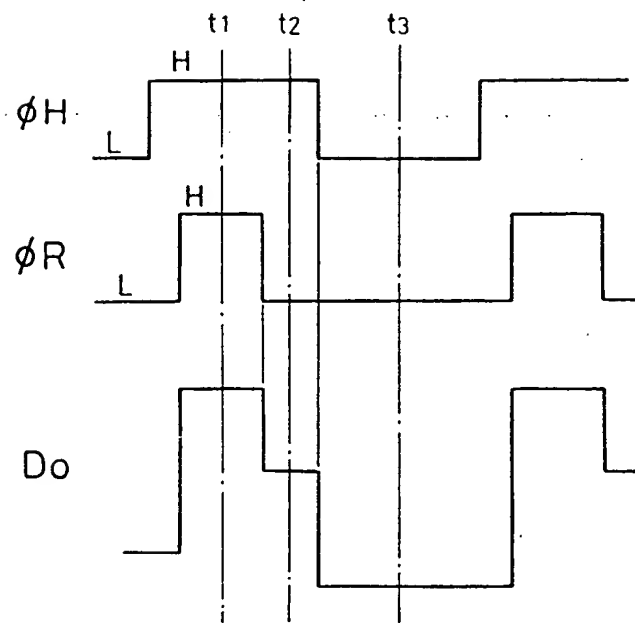
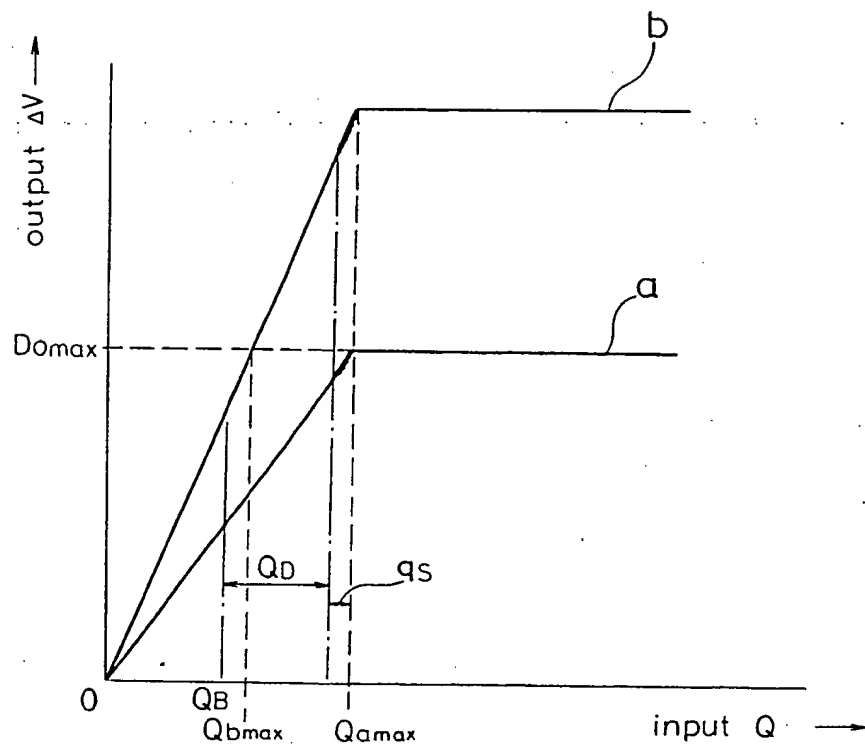


FIG. 8. (PRIOR ART)



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